

LANGPORT RURAL SANITARY AUTHORITY.

ANNUAL REPORT OF MEDICAL OFFICER FOR 1894.

TO THE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS

GENTLEMEN,

I am able to report favourably on the Sanitary state of your District during the past year, as testified by a reduced Death rate, a lessened Infant mortality, and an almost total absence of Infectious disease. The enumeration of deaths with their assigned causes will be found in Table "A" appended to this Report. Table "B" gives the cases of sickness which have come to the notice of the Medical Officer, and which have not proved fatal. It is imperfect as a record on account of their being no compulsory notification.

One case of Typhoid Fever was reported at Somerton, and a polluted well, to which it owed its origin, was closed. An outbreak of measles necessitated the closure of the Public School at High Ham for some time, and the epidemic passed off without a death. There was also a slight outbreak of Scarlatina at Puckington, at the beginning of the year; and this comprises the total of infectious disease with which we have had to deal.

Phthisis or Pulmonary consumption was responsible for 11 deaths, and was again mostly found among women, or men who led an indoor life. Inflammatory lung disease was again conspicuous, especially among the aged and may be attributed to the inferior and comfortless cottages of many of the poor in the District, to which I shall have further to allude.

WATER SUPPLY.

One of the most fertile sources of Disease is a polluted supply of water. In this district it is mostly from Wells, and, in the absence of Springs or running streams, and with a scattered and diminishing population, it could hardly be otherwise. The Wells however are not deep and in anything like a Town or Village, there is a liability to pollution from Cess pits, which, in such places, universally exist in an ancient and modern form. Where the village is of sufficient size to bear the expense, it is very desirable that a pure supply should be brought in from an outside source. Such a Scheme is under consideration for Somerton, which it is intended to supply with water by pipes from a distant Spring, nearly all the existing Wells being polluted by an antiquity of filth.

Westport is another Village much in need of water, and a Scheme is in process of development for that place, by means of a conduit from Barrington.

Lastly, Langport, which is entirely supplied by Wells, has been under consideration, in consequence of an unfavourable analysis of its Town Pump. By lining the Well with brick a more favourable Analysis has since been obtained; but the supply cannot be considered satisfactory as, after heavy rain, pollution may again occur.

The difficulty of supplying such small places with water, arises from the expense which, if heavy, will depopulate them, vacant Houses of the better class being on the increase. The taste for rural life appears to be diminishing, and it is difficult to find a tenant for any house not in close proximity to a Railway Station.

THE FLOODS.

A large area in this District is subject to periodical



inundation. Owing to the natural features of the land, an immense body of water descends from the uplands upon a vast level expanse, and it is doubtful whether any artificial device could obviate this. The result to Langport is, that being built upon the edge of this Plain, and the Main Street being built upon a causeway traversing this level, it is placed under water to a depth of two to four feet after heavy rain. Although no epidemic can be traced as a result, there has been great destruction of property, interference with comfort, and deterioration of health. An effort has been made of late years to arrest the flooding of the Town by constructing an artificial rampart of earth round it, but without success; and it is doubtful whether any engineering scheme for carrying off the flood water more rapidly, would be successful. The only remedy seems to be to gradually abandon the Cottages at the lower end of the Town, and allow for its future growth by throwing open adjacent and more suitable land for building. Unfortunately the land in the immediate vicinity of the Town is held by territorial magnates who are averse to parting with a single square yard, and Langport is therefore interdicted from any future improvement or extension. The only prospect seems to lie in a Parish Council taking possession of the land on the ground of public utility. At present, during times of flood, after a heavy rainfall, cows may be seen grazing on dry land, while human beings are wallowing in filth.

It is extremely doubtful whether dwellings can be considered fit for healthy occupation, after being immersed in water to a depth of from two to four feet.

Another feature in Langport is the system of drainage, which is entirely opposed to modern sanitation, although in this instance it is of great antiquity. An open ditch

parallel with the Street receives the drainage of the Houses, and three Slaughter-houses. An occasional scour is administered by closing the locks below, but the fall being slight, it is only partially effectual, and in a dry season has to be abandoned altogether. The result is that a mephitic smell pervades the Houses in summer. This is another instance of the unsuitability of a piece of level marsh as a site of Houses and a further reason why healthy sites should be placed at the disposal of those willing to erect wholesome dwellings. This is a matter which will certainly have to be considered by the County Council, unless the private rights of Landowners are considered of more importance than the health of those who reside in small places like Langport.

Mr Naylor in his report to the Rivers Pollution Committee reiterates the objection to the present system, but his remarks would have possessed more practical value had he suggested a remedy. The Slaughter-Houses, the imperfect flushings, and the unwholesome smell in summer are well known, and have often been reported, though Mr Naylor considers them in the light of a sudden revelation. In my opinion the true remedy consists in the gradual abandonment of most of the tenements situated on Marsh Land, and the rebuilding on more healthy sites, when they are available. This must necessarily be a work of time, but the preliminary steps might be initiated, and the result would probably be the growth and development of Langport, especially if, as seems probable, Railway development in the future, places it in more direct communication with other places.

I enclose the Report of the Sanitary Inspector which shews an active attention to details; but I would also point out that there is no Inspection of Dairies and Cow-houses, as required by recent Acts.

As regards the housing of the Working classes in this district, I have had ample opportunity for forming an Estimate.

I find many Cottages old and dilapidated, and not adapted to modern ideas of comfort.

Assuming that every habitation should have a dry basement, and a sound roof, a sleeping apartment with the casement opening directly into the air, and a fire-place with chimney, for ventilation in summer, and warmth in winter illness, there are a great number which do not realize this standard. On the other hand rents are low, often eighteen-pence a week, and the return is too small to tempt capitalists into erecting such property. With the present low rate of wages it is difficult to suggest how more could be paid. The surrounding garden is generally a source of health, and some mitigation where it exists; and the overcrowding of a large number on a small superficial space which is so detrimental to health in Towns, of course does not here exist.

I would also point out that while the rate of mortality has steadily diminished of late years, it has not yet attained the standard achieved in some Rural Districts, but some influence is also due to the large proportion of persons of advanced age, which I believe to exist.

I am, Gentlemen,

Yours faithfully

(Sd)

JOHN MORGAN F.R.C.S.

Medical Officer of Health.

A P P E N D I X I.

STATISTICS APPENDED TO THE MEDICAL OFFICER'S REPORT FOR
LANGPORT 1894.

Population	14,485	Census	1891		
Area	57,109	Acres			
Death rate			$\frac{1894}{15.4}$	- $\frac{1893}{16.8}$	- $\frac{1892}{18.5}$
Tymotic Death rate			.03	.02	05
Infant mortality - Under one year			31	34	35
Infant mortality - per 1000 Births			68	83	118

T H E W O R K H O U S E

There was one birth and thirteen deaths in the Workhouse during the year. The tendency of late has been to convert the Workhouse into a general Hospital, and cases of severe accident, advanced disease, and hopeless infirmities are now of frequent occurrence, being sent in by the District Medical Officers when their necessities become urgent. Of the thirteen deaths eleven were over sixty years of age. One was suffering from Diphtheria, and one from spinal disease and congenital deformity. Considering the vacant Wards now to be found in the House, a pair of day Wards might be arranged for such of the patients and Infirm Inmates as are able to leave their beds and sit at a table. Such a room arranged with framed Prints on the walls and a few newspapers which would no doubt be given by friends, would serve to ameliorate the condition of the Inmates in a marked degree, and would do much to remove the prejudice to Workhouse life which exists among the poor.

There can be no question that the physical condition

of the aged poor is subject to far greater amelioration in the Workhouse than can be found among the recipients of the pittance known as Outdoor Relief. This is confirmed by the extreme ages often attained.

Monotony, which is the chief drawback to Workhouse life, has been much relieved by the ministration of Lady Visitors, and by the occasional entertainments given at their instigation during the past year.

District.

The subjoined numbers have also to be taken into account in judging of the above records of mortality. See Note 5 on back.

NOTES ON TABLES A AND B.

NOTE 1. *Medical Officers of Health of "Combined Districts" must make a separate Return for the District of each District Council.*

2. *Medical Officers of Health acting for a portion only of the District of a District Council should write, in the heading of the Table, the designation of the Division for which they act.*

3. *The words "Urban," "Rural," or "Metropolitan" must be inserted in the appropriate space in the heading, according as the District is Urban or Rural, or is within the Metropolitan Area.*

4. *The "Localities" adopted for the purpose of these statistics should be areas of known population; such as parishes, groups of parishes, townships or wards.*

As stated at the head of the first column in each Table, *Public Institutions* should be regarded as separate localities, and the deaths in them should be separately recorded. Workhouses, Hospitals, Infirmarys, Asylums, and other establishments into which numbers of people, and especially of sick people, are received are Public Institutions for the purpose of these statistics.

5. *The deaths which have to be classified in this Table (A), and summed up in the horizontal line of "Totals," are the whole of those registered as having actually occurred in the several localities comprised within the Division or District. But the registered number of deaths frequently requires correction before it can give an exact view of the mortality of a Division or District; and the two lowest horizontal lines are provided for the purpose of enabling Medical Officers of Health to indicate, to the best of their ability, what the extent of such corrections should be. Details concerning the corrective figures, e.g., the institutions that have been considered, or the particular localities to which corrections apply, may appear in the text of the report or in supplementary tables.*

Area and Population of the District or Division to which this Return relates.			
Area in Acres _____			
Population (1891) _____			
Death Rates.	{	General _____	{ per 1,000 Population.
		Infant _____	{ per 1,000 Births Registered.

In recording the facts under the various headings of Tables A and B, attention has been given to the notes endorsed on the Tables.

Medical Officer of Health.

(Date) _____, 1895.

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NOTES ON TABLE **B.**

(See also Notes on back of Table A.)

NOTE 1. The present *Table B.* is concerned with population, births, and sickness (not with mortality) in the district or division to which the Table relates.

2. As stated in the heading of Col. (a), *Public Institutions* should be regarded as separate localities, and the new cases of sickness in them should be separately recorded. Workhouses, Hospitals, Infirmaries, Asylums, and other establishments into which numbers of people, and especially of sick people, are received, are Public Institutions for the purpose of these statistics.

3. *Comments on any unequal incidence of notifiable disease upon the several localities, and considerations as to the local incidence of consumption and other prevalent diseases, should be made in the text of the Report.*

Somerton. January 11th 1895.

To J. Morgan Esq.,

Medical Officer of Health.

Dear Sir,

Appended is a Summary of the work done for the past year, ended December 31st 1894, as Sanitary Inspector to the Langport Union Rural Sanitary Authority:-

Number of premises inspected	573
Defects discovered owing to foul and defective Cess-pits, ditches, drains and water courses	79
Accumulations causing a Nuisance	91
Houses overcrowded	1
Samples of water taken for analysis	7

PARTICULARS OF WORK DONE FOR THE
ABATEMENT OF NUISANCES.

Number of Cess-pits, Drains or Ditches repaired or cleansed, and deposits removed	107
New Drains, and alterations	15
Dwelling houses cleansed and limewashed	19
Slaughter Houses do do	11
Cases of Overcrowding abated	1

This is irrespective of the work done by special Order of the Board under the Housing of the Working Classes Act, under which Order there were 1723 inspections made, and 337 Houses cleansed, limewashed, and rendered wholesome.

The question of the disposal of House refuse, more especially at Langport should not be lost sight of. At present a very large quantity is thrown into the ditches,

causing shoals of debris, and bays of stagnant water, thereby rendering it quite impossible to do the flushing effectually until removed.

The majority of the Cottage property that were flooded in the District by the floods of November 13th and 15th were supplied with various disinfectants for the purpose of cleansing and purifying the lower rooms.

I am, Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

(Sd)

J. T. HAWKINS

Sanitary Inspector.

LANGPORT RURAL SANITARY

AUTHORITY..

MEDICAL OFFICER'S REPORT
for the year ending
31st December 1894.
